

CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON LEP

CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT

MAY 2021

Summary

1. The past month has had a sense of transition to it as the economy has begun to move out of lockdown, a new Police and Crime Commissioner has been elected alongside new councillors in Warrington, our newly constituted boards and committees have begun to operate, and the detailed engagement with Government Officials has begun on the LEP Review.

Local Elections

2. As everyone is aware, local elections took place in some places on Thursday 6 May. In C&W there was an election for all the members of Warrington Borough Council which resulted in another comfortable majority for Labour – albeit with an increase in Conservative representation from two seats to eleven, but there was a change of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), with David Keane (Labour) losing his position to John Dwyer (Conservative). John has been to the PCC once before from 2012 – 2016.

LEP Review

3. The national LEP Review is now well underway and our Strategy Programme Board is due to have a detailed discussion about it at its meeting on 14 May. To date, the engagement between the LEP Network and Government Officials has been excellent and they have shown themselves very willing to listen to LEP views and reflect them in the proposals they will be putting to Ministers. Locally, LA officers and ourselves are holding a seminar on 20 May to discuss the role the LEP plays within the context of the wider sub-regional work programme. One of the papers going to that session is a long list detailing all the roles the LEP currently plays in the sub-region which the Strategy Programme Board will be reviewing at its meeting on 14 May.
4. One of the early manifestations of the changing role of LEPs is the additional funding we have already been provided for the Growth Hub, allowing it to complete a recruitment process recently for three additional team members. This enhanced team will enable the Growth Hub to offer in depth account management to businesses with growth ambitions as well as deliver a growth focussed Peer Network programme to 100 ambitious SMEs from across Cheshire and Warrington. This approach will allow the team to build on the lead role the Growth Hub took in supporting businesses through the pandemic and EU exit.

Relaxation of Covid Restrictions and LEP Recovery Plan

5. The next set of Covid restrictions are due to be relaxed on Monday 17 May. Feedback from businesses since the initial relaxation on 12 April has been that they have been trading very well, and there are strong forward bookings for indoor hospitality post -17 May. As a result,

and perhaps slightly surprisingly given that unemployment is still relatively high, hospitality businesses are beginning to report difficulties with recruiting staff. This is a national phenomenon which we are aiming to address locally by encouraging employers to link up with DWP's Kickstart programme alongside taking advantage of the job fairs that we fund and getting them to post vacancies on our Opportunities Portal. As a result of the strength of the restart, visitor and hospitality businesses have suggested that Marketing Cheshire holds back the marketing campaign it had been planning but stands ready to deploy it if trade falls away after the initial bounce-back.

6. As the restart has begun, we have been holding some very well attended consultation sessions on our Economic Recovery Plan and Melissa Crellin will be presenting a near final version of the plan later in the Board agenda. The response to it has been very positive, but one of the key comments we have heard is about the huge uncertainty about how the economy will recover, how many people will return to offices, what levels of traffic and public transport patronage will we see etc. Melissa is therefore proposing that we commit to producing another version of the plan by the end of the year that will have a more medium term focus than the existing document but which will also be able to take account of what has actually happened on the ground as the recovery progresses.

Marketing Cheshire

7. Marketing Cheshire is working closely with all three local authorities on destination marketing, visitor support, and Welcome Back funds, with very positive feedback coming from visitor economy partner networks who want to continue to support MC, including new partners such as Avanti. It is also continuing to develop the LEP brand, and take the lead on communications and design work across the whole of the organisation.
8. As with the other LEP Boards and Committees, a number of new members joined the Marketing Cheshire Board last month and have been involved in a very good strategy session and their first board meeting. There was agreement on supporting the visitor economy in the short-term and developing its approach to support the LEP vision through place marketing throughout the rest of the year. The Board has also now finalised the budget for 2021/22, reflecting increased confidence about its commercial income for the year.

PHILIP COX